

The Must.

MUSINGS.

BY AMELIA WELBY.

I wandered out, one summer night—
 'Twas when my years were few;
 The breeze was singing in the light,
 And I was singing too.
 The moonbeams lay upon the hill,
 The shadows in the vale,
 And here and there a leaping rill
 Was laughing at the gale.
 One fleecy cloud upon my eye
 Was all that met my gaze;
 It floated like an angel there,
 Between me and the sky.
 I clapped my hands, and warbled wild
 As here and there I flew;
 For I was but a careless child,
 And did as children do.

The waves came dashing o'er the sea,
 In bright and glittering bands;
 Like little children with their glees,
 They lashed their thirsty hands.
 They lashed their hands, but ere I caught
 Their mingled drops of dew,
 They kissed my face—as quick as thought
 Away the ripples flew.

The twilight hours like birds flew by,
 As lightly and as free as they;
 Ten thousand stars were in the sky,
 Ten thousand in the sea;
 For every wave, with dimpled face,
 That leaped into the air,
 Had caught a star in its embrace,
 And hid it trembling there.

The young moon, too, with upturned sides,
 Her mirrored face to show,
 And as a mark at anchor rides,
 She rode upon the wave.

The sea was like the sea above,
 As perfect as the whole,
 Save that it seemed to thrill with love,
 As should the immortal soul.

The flowers, all faded to their dreams,
 Were bowed in slumber there;
 By beery hills and murmuring streams,
 Where'er they clung to be.

No guilty tears had they to weep,
 No sighs to tell of pain;
 They closed their eyes and went to sleep,
 Right in the face of heaven.

No costly raiment round them shone,
 No jewels from the sea;
 Yet Solomon upon his throne,
 Was ne'er arrayed like these;

And just as free from guilt and art
 Were lovely human forms;
 Ere sorrow cut her bleeding heart
 On this fair world of ours.

I heard the laughing wind behind
 A playing with my hair—
 The breezy fingers of the wind,
 How cool and moist they were!

I heard the night-bird warbling o'er
 Its soft and soothing note;
 I never heard such sounds before,
 And never shall again.

Then wherefore weave such strains as these,
 And sing them day by day,
 When every bird upon the breeze
 Can sing a sweeter lay?

I'd give the world for their sweet art,
 I'd give the world for their sweet art,
 I'd give the world for their sweet art,
 As they have melted mine.

The Story-Teller.

From Godey's Lady's Book.

WHAT IS THE CHARM?

A PLAIN STORY.

BY MRS. E. OAKES SMITH.

CHAPTER I.

"Tell and erect the maiden stands,
 The young girl's heart is true,
 Some creature form of solitude,
 And hearing still the low and rude,
 Yet brave heart of nature's hand."—WATTS.

I wish Margaret Hunter had been a handsome girl; but she was not, and therefore will be thought unfit for a heroine. I wish she had been brilliant, witty, seductive, the admiration of men, and yet her story must be told, unassuming as it is. True, we might draw upon the ideal, and with the aid of a lively imagination, make the plain, quiet, diligent Margaret, a doting, spiritual creature, who would inspire the boldest souls; but truth and correctness are better than all things beside, so poor Margaret's story must be told just as it was.

I could wish, too, that Margaret had not been the daughter of a poor widow, who had never seen better days; for, had the case been otherwise, had her mother retained relics of former elegance, the remembered graces of polished life, vestiges of beauty worn and softened, and elevated by misfortune, a sympathy for my poor girl would have been at once established; but the truth was poor, irritable, and blind of one eye. She had never been above want, and had, moreover, those sharp angles of temper and person so of 'n found the attendants of labor and poverty. She talked little, and rarely upon subjects disconnected with household employments, or the little frettings that make up so much of a woman's existence. Her husband had been a man of cheerful, pious bent, who died leaving her with two children, girls, Margaret, the subject of our story, and Cordelia, who was two years older. The sisters were alike in nothing but their affection for each other, the eldest having inherited the father's beauty and vivacity of character, while Margaret was a pale, silent worshipper of graces which nature had denied to herself.

The mother's heart warmed to her fairer child, and when an epidemic suddenly closed her life, grief and tears made such havoc upon her as to occasion blindness. Poor Margaret had no confidence in her own power of consoling; her own heart too was wrung at this heavy calamity; so this little which left her to toil and loneliness; for the graces of her sister had been to her like the song of birds, the loveliness of flowers, the inviting and hallowing beauty of blue skies, like all things that refresh and ennoble the heart; and now that she was gone, she felt as if shut in to entire solitude, and her motto for words was lost, for her mother never addressed her except in the language of complaint. But let us enter the dwelling of the widow, and listen to the dialogue, or rather the monologue, of the matron, as a specimen of daily intercourse.

The widow sat next the open door spinning flax, upon what is called a "small wheel," which is turned by a crank touched by the foot. To a person seated a little at one side, so that the outlines of the instrument would be invisible, only the distaff rising above her shoulder, she might have presented a most unflattering representation of one of the Paros spinning the thread of human life, and the low hum of the wheel suggested a song of mystery and sadness; the wind stealing through the branches of the elm, and stirring the vine leaves, breathed aside the gray locks from her thin temples, while a straggling sunbeam sharpened the outlines of her shrunken face, with the lips parted by thoughts which were those of endurance, but regret. The entire loss of one eye caused her to bend the head at one side, giving her the appearance of intense and absorbed attention.

Margaret was seated near the open window with needle in hand, and so still were all her motions, that she seemed more like a piece of

machinery put in motion than anything possessed of flesh and blood. Her look was not that of unhappiness, but simply quiescence. She was perhaps twenty or thereabouts; but a glance of her face would have convinced an observer that few emotions had ever stirred at her heart. Gray eyes, under brows arched with oriental nicety, gave a softness to a face otherwise severe from its paleness and finely defined outlines. The nose was somewhat high, the lips, evenly defined and closing naturally, were not full nor bright in color, and the chin, which did not project, had still a certain look of decision supposed to be incompatible with feminine beauty. Her hair, fastened by a single braid at the back of the head, was soft but discolored to curl. In size she was slightly below the medium height, and of an agreeable roundness of outline, but an air and look so entirely unresponsive of the fascinations and coquetry of her sex, that at sixteen she might have been supposed to be forty in looks and manner, except that no asperities existed in either.

The mother lifted her eyes from the thread she was twisting, and looked somewhat intently upon the face of her daughter.

"What is it, mother?" said the latter, who was aware of the severe scrutiny she was undergoing.

"I was thinking, Margaret, and wondered if you knew how very ugly you are, and if you did know, whether you would feel about it."

"Not in the least, mother."

"Well, that is so strange; you are very odd, too, Margaret, and bad tempered."

"I am sorry, mother," responded the girl, "without lifting her eyes or moving a muscle."

"Well," continued the mother. "When I was at your age, I should have been mad enough had anybody told me I was ugly."

"That was because you had sometimes been called handsome, and people admired you."

"That is true—I was always called handsome. I might have had three or four others at the time I chose your father."

Margaret was silent, and so was the widow's wheel awhile, and then the wheel and the tongue went on again; for the old and the withered had caught a glimpse of the fairy bud of youth, where were blossoms, and freshness, and verdure—love—aye, love, the bliss and the bane of a woman's life; and now that the vision faded, she turned the wheel heavily once more, as if loth to take up the burden of age, and grief, and solitude.

"Margaret, 'tis strange you never had an admirer."

"I am ugly and bad tempered, mother."

"That is true; but even Polly Hart, who is half an idiot, has a lover; and Jane Baxter, who is much uglier, is going to marry the minister. Oh! Cordelia was so beautiful—had she lived, she would have made some grand marriage, and I should not be telling her lies in day and out."

This time Margaret sighed heavily. "Cordelia was very beautiful, dear mother, and she did not work any more. I can do enough for both."

"Aye," continued the mother, "her name was so lovely, too—your father took it out of a book called Shakespeare, and he used to tell how the girl the loved her old father, and staid by him when he was old and blind, just as Cordelia would have staid by me."

There was a tear on Margaret's lid, so she could hardly see her needle, and she whispered—

"And just as I will do, dear mother."

"But then Cordelia was so beautiful, and her voice so low—just like the girl's in the book. I never could get her Deley, somehow—though I often call you Peggy; but then you are not at all like Cordelia."

Margaret sewed on, and the wheel was silent again; for the phantoms of buried affection came to the mind's eye of the widow—she was again loving and beloved, listening to the bird tones of her lovely and lost—but these receded again, and she held old and withered, and her shrivelled hands hardly held the ashes of the past. The wheel goes its weary round, the thread gathers upon the spindle, but the flax upon the distaff is well nigh spent.

CHAPTER II.

"Untouched by mortal pin,
 That transient of heavenly birth;
 Pure as the effluence of a star,
 Just reached our distant earth."—ALDRICH.

At another time the mother and daughter were sitting somewhat as we have described them, except that the shadows of twilight were closing out the warm redness of a summer sky, and the wheel of the mother was pushed aside, and the girl's work lay idly upon her knee, for the light was too faint for her occupation.

"I am thinking, Margaret, you never read to me except out of the Bible. Your father and Cordelia both liked books, and read such sweet stories—and you never talk, either."

"I am very stupid, dear mother. I can do nothing agreeable—only work."

"Yes, you seem made for it—some use. Cordelia was so different. Why do you never read anything but the bible?"

Margaret cast a sad look around the barren apartment, which contained not a single volume except the one held most sacred, and replied, softly—

"We are poor, dear mother, and must read that which will keep us nearest to our duty. Let me tell you a story, though I fear I shall tell it too poorly."

"It cannot be otherwise, Margaret; you have so little talent; but let me hear it," and she leaned her head against the back of the chair to listen.

A painful blush flitted over the face of the poor girl as she commenced. "There was once a poor widow traveling into a distant country to seek friends, whom she had known in the early part of her life. The widow had nothing in the world but two daughters, both of whom she loved most tenderly." It will be perceived that, with her usual freedom, Margaret had taken the exquisite story of the devoted Ruth to recount, suppressing the names and events incidental to the development of the womanly affection of the lovely heroine. When she closed, which she did with a trembling voice, the widow responded: "There, the girl was just such another as Cordelia would have been—so gentle, so affectionate, so unwilling to leave her old blind mother. But, Margaret, it sounds like something I have read somewhere—what was the girl's name?—you didn't give any name."

Margaret was too ingenious to effect further invention, and she answered candidly—

"Ruth, dear mother."

"Ruth!" cried the widow, starting in alarm at the irreverence of Margaret. "Why, Peggy Hunter, have you had the impudence to alter a story from the Bible to impose upon your poor blind mother?"

"I am sure, mother—"

She was stopped by a shadow that passed the door-sill, and a slight knock, and the primitive "walk in" from the widow, presented another personage to the little group, and relieved Margaret from further reprimand.

"Dr. Holton, that's you, I know by the heavy square step," cried the widow, jumping up with unwonted alacrity. "And where have you been?—and how long have you been home?—and what have you been doing all this time?"

Dr. Holton smiled at the very large mouth, with white, strong teeth, and replied in a voice so very deep, that the listener, if a stranger, could not help a start of surprise, and answered—

"Why, mother, I will answer as fast as I can. I have been to the city learning how to save people's lives—but, in truth, how to kill them easily—and have just got home, not three minutes since."

"Just got home," resumed the widow, "and here the first place! where you went to the minister's and the squire's and the merchant's!"

"Yes, mother. Why not?"

"Well, I don't know—I'm blind, and—"

and—Margaret is ugly and—"

The doctor laughed loudly. "Margaret isn't so bad, mother, after all," he at length said, talking the chair, which the girl proffered with crimson cheeks and embarrassed air.

The doctor looked up the second time—"Why, Margaret, you have grown handsome," he cried.

"She will have to grow a long time to that," said the widow.

Margaret, without comment, quietly adjusted the supper-table, and the three sat down.

"Do you never talk?" asked the doctor, looking up suddenly to Margaret's face.

"Not often," she replied, and was again silent.

"Well, that is strange," he mused.

"Not at all," cried the mother. "What could she say?"

"That is true, mother," answered the girl—"But then I have so many thoughts, that I often wish I could talk; and sometimes wish for beauty, and then people would be willing to listen."

The doctor dropped his knife and his jaw at the same time, and stared so at Margaret, that she laughed and colored to the eyes.

"Well," he answered, "if that isn't about as honest a speech as I ever heard, and well put, too. Somehow, mother, I like to be here better than anywhere else; and I guess 'tis because I am waiting to hear Margaret talk."

Then turning to Margaret, he touched her pulse professionally—"All right; strong, even, face flushed—sudden fever—pulse quicker."

Margaret laughed and withdrew her wrist.

"I'll tell you what it is, Margaret, you must talk with me. I—what shall we talk about? I cannot think of anything but drops, and pills, and powders—and fevers, and apoplexies, and consumptions. What disease would you like to die of, Margaret?"

"Of love," answered the girl.

"Of love!" ejaculated the doctor. "Why, they prescribe marriage for that, and it always cures. Die of love!"

"Yes," she murmured, in the same quiet tone. "I'm ashamed for you, Margaret," said the widow. "You are nearer fool than I thought for."

"I dare say," was the reply. "But, mother, I have thought, when I hear you talk, that to love or to be loved must be a very solemn and beautiful thing."

"So it must be," cried the doctor. "I never thought of it before."

"Well, doctor," renewed the widow, "if I was going to speak my mind plainly, I should say that you were well nigh as stupid as Margaret."

The doctor did not laugh heartily this time—on the contrary, he sank into deep thought, and in his fit of abstraction rolled particles of bread into a heap of little pills, each in size and color resembling those called "dyspepsia pills." At length he looked at Margaret again, and asked—

"Don't you think you could die of love for James Dickson, my medical student? He is a handsome youth, Margaret?"

"I never thought anything about," answered the girl, with the greatest possible candor; but she colored slightly and went on, confining her little dreams of romance to the only book with which she was conversant.

"I have sometimes thought I might love such men as Job, and Abraham, and Jonathan, in the Bible; but I don't think I should love, nor King David, nor Solomon."

"Well, Margaret Hunter, you've read and spelt, and now I'd keep still if I were you," retorted the mother.

"I must say, I think it's queer I never in my life thought so much about these matters before. But, Margaret, there was Ruth and Abigail, rare women, or, as the words run, 'of good understanding and a beautiful countenance.' I have often found myself thinking how they looked, and somehow their faces grew just like yours, Margaret."

"That is, that is," replied the girl.

"So it is, now that I think of it," and the poor doctor bestowed himself to rolling pellets of bread with diligence.

"Why, what is that on your wrist, doctor?" cried the widow, peering down suddenly at the doctor's hand.

"A snake, as you say, I live!"

The good man now presented his wrist, and showed a small oblong circlet rudely cut, and bearing a rough representation of a serpent.

Then setting himself comfortably into the chair, and adjusting his shoulder in a way that the collar of his coat became a support to his short neck and heavy head, he told the story of the little ornament.

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Dr. Holton had been for many years the sole physician of the little village of Sa—; but as his custom was extensive, he had recently taken into his office a conjugal pair by the name of James Dickson, a smart, handsome youth, with a resolute black eye, and that audacious, enterprising manner, which we at once admire and distrust.

James had a ready wit, and a fruitfulness of invention, which won the entire admiration of the good, easy doctor, and by which he acquired a most unlimited influence over him. The good man had taken Dickson to relieve himself of a portion of professional labor; but, in truth, he partly ever sent him except upon some trivial case of a tooth to be extracted, or a nail taken from the foot of some unlucky boy.

The good man with all this instinctive distrust, imagined he could not live without Dickson; that he was invaluable to him, the one of all others to aid him in the duties of his art. He talked roundly of the skill and address of William, the jester, laughed immediately at all but the doctor, and it will be seen that he was one of the kindest, most unsuspicious of mortals; just the man for an unscrupulous rascal to impose upon, but one whom a villain of any generosity would spare.

Self-sacrificing to the last degree, he never failed in the slightest shade of duty to the sick and suffering, while in affairs of his own he was contentedly forgetful and blundering. Aware of this fact, when articles essential to his comfort or convenience one of his disappeared, he always concluded he may have mislaid or dropped them on the way. Indeed, during a cold season, Dickson boasted he had for three weeks worn the good man's overcoat, putting it on and buttoning it up right before his eyes, the credulous doctor all the time congratulating him upon the comfort of such a coat, and quietly counting the watch which had stolen his own from the entry. When at length Dickson received his own expected garment from the city, and confessed the trick he had practiced, on one laughed heartier than the doctor, and no one told the story with a better zest.

Still, Dickson was not a favorite with the better part of the population, and often as he dashed by in the light gig of the doctor, while he, good man, trudged off to a patient on foot, the elders shook their heads and wondered Dr. Holton should be so blind. The truth was, the easy assurance, the light animal spirits, and vivacious fun of the young man, wrought merriment upon him, and affected him with a pleasing sense of health and life, and freedom, almost amounting to envy. Often did he find his room saturated with cigar smoke; an odor excessively revolting to his senses; but he only screwed his face into every possible ugly shape, blew his lips, opened the windows, and muttered little words of such, such as the "gentle Kate" of Housatonic might be supposed to utter. When matters were rearranged, he buried himself in some holy logic, and had any one asked him, an hour after, if Dickson ever smoked, he would have been at a loss for a reply.

Once, however, the doctor had occasion to go to the room of Dickson at midnight, and nothing could exceed his grief and amazement to find him stretched upon the bed, boots and hat on, and he insensible from intoxication. He felt his pulse, examined his breath, and when no doubt remained, he ejaculated—"Poor, poor boy!" To undress him, to bathe his hands and temples in water, and watch all night by his side, were trifles to the sorrow which he felt. When consciousness returned, he took him in his arms as if he had been a sick child, and cautioned, and implored, and even tried to bribe him to abstinance by every indulgence it was in his power to bestow. When fully restored, the youth, with a light laugh, a gay whistle, and indiscriminate promises, at once soothed and silenced the good man, and matters went on as before; for the doctor never once dreamed that a human being, who had friends and responsibilities, could break a promise.

From this time the doctor was on the alert to do him good, to place him in a position where the recurrence of temptation would be avoided, and he hemmed in, as it were, to right habits. For this purpose, a marriage seemed the most certain and effectual mode, and the worthy doctor busied himself in every way to throw Dickson and Margaret together. At first, the youth met the subject with immoderate laughter, for he was himself entirely devoid of forethought; but when his patron persisted in urging the point, he condescended to inquire who the girl was he designed to become Mrs. Dickson!

"Margaret Hunter, to be sure," answered the doctor, with more than wonted spirit. "Margaret Hunter, as nice a girl as ever trod shoe-leather."

"What, that tall, pale girl, who leads an old blind woman into church every Sunday?" asked Dickson.

"The very one," said the doctor, rubbing his hands. "Pale she is, but clear as a lily, and—"

and—of a good understanding and a beautiful countenance."

Of course, the excitement in the village was very great; and when it was ascertained that Dickson and another youth of good family had suddenly disappeared, excitement was at its height. Dr. Holton refused to prosecute the subject, declaring he had never loved anything in this world so well as the boy Dickson, and he would never be instrumental in bringing him to punishment. This was undoubtedly weak and eccentric, but was in strict accordance with his character. Indeed, so far from seeking his punishment, the good man sent him a letter, addressed to New York, where he would be most likely to go, advising him to settle at once in his profession, to break away from bad companions, and if ever he needed either aid or a friend, to apply to him, Dr. Holton.

After the matter had been fully discussed at the tavern; after the merchant had made it a subject upon which to base a lecture upon blindness and extravagance to his clerks; and all the ladies of the village had exchanged their little gossip and wonderments; and the minister made it a fruitful theme for a stirring Sabbath-day appeal, the whole died away and was forgotten.

Not so with the doctor; he grew more abstracted than ever, lost his appetite and good humor; and, indeed, was so much changed that the people of the village had a new subject for talk. All the old ladies sent him deceptions and jellies, and the young ones sent him comforts, and were pretty kind of worried, and book-marks, mostly with anchors embrodered upon them. Still the doctor grew rather the worse.

One day, on coming out of church, with her mother leaning heavily upon her arm, Margaret was so much struck with the change, that she could not forbear an expression of grief. The doctor scarcely replied, but walked in silence by her side.

"I have always felt sorry, doctor, that I told you I saw Dickson upon that dreadful night. I did not think you loved him so well," she at length said.

"I did not think it either, Margaret;—but it does seem as if I had nobody to say a word to, now that this has happened."

"Why don't you get married, then?" abruptly asked the widow.

"I get married!—why I never thought of such a thing. And now I think of it, I will take this confounded chair, for I've had nothing but trouble and ill luck since I put it on. I've been ever since consumed by a slow fever. Here, Margaret, press upon that end while I take it off."

side of attack. But Margaret was accustomed to these shapes, and, indeed, so familiar to them, that those of peculiar form served as guide points by which she measured distances.

The clouds, which had been so thick as entirely to conceal the moon in her first quarter, were now slightly scattered, and threw the broken stone wall, the stump-fence, and the deacon's old white horse, which grazed in the pasture, into bold relief. There was a faint whistle, and then young Dickson shot by upon the other side of the road without perceiving Margaret.

The girl, as we have said, encountered Dickson at the doctor's door, who must have heard the message which she brought; she, therefore, concluded he had hurried on before them. But she had hardly time to collect her thoughts, so intent was she in observing the different guises which marked her way.

"Surely," she said to herself, as she caught a glimpse of the doctor upon a rising ground, "that stump has borrowed a new arm—it never had but one before." A slight motion of the new arm, and the faint moonlight threw back a glance from the barrel of a rifle. Unconscious of what she did, Margaret uttered a loud scream and rushed forward, almost at the same moment that a sharp flash and report broke the stillness of the night.

"Every bottle in my pocket smashed!" muttered the doctor, exclaiming the pouring liquids in his hand. "But I have yet—oh! yes, you rascals, I have you!" and the resolute man seized the nearest object, and darted ahead with a speed and fury perfectly surprising.

These events were so near the dwelling of the widow, that, astonished at the sound of fire-arms at that hour, or, indeed, at all in the peaceful little village of Sa—, she hastened to the door to ascertain what it could mean. She was the better able to do this, as her fits of illness were much after the manner of Wordsworth's old Susan Gale, the result of interstices and solitude. She had scarcely opened the door, when the doctor, panting under a heavy weight and muttering many hard speeches, and calling many very hard names, stumbled over the door-sill and shook down his burden in the centre of the room.

By this time, Mrs. Hunter had donned a cloak over her somewhat brief and airy garments, and brought a tallow candle to bear upon the subject which so much engrossed the doctor.

"Margaret Hunter, as true as I live!" cried the widow, bending her eye over the girl.

The doctor stood in the very attitude which he first held when he dropped her upon the floor, grasping her arm in his hand with the tightness of a vice.

"Shot right through the heart!" murmured Margaret, half unclosing her eyes.